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THE STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR AFRICA (STPA) SELECTED ISSUES AND PROBLEMS AND FUTURE PLAN OF ACTION

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I. Introduction

1. Although since its inception in 1958, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been constantly concerned about statistical training in Africa, the general framework within which such training was to be organized was set up only in 1978. The Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) was adopted by the tenth session of the Conference of African Statisticians in 1977 and was formally established by ECO(XVIII)/Resolution 9 of the ECA Executive Committee in 1978.

2. STPA is now about six years old. Following a transitory period mainly devoted to organizational matters, the programme's activities rapidly expanded during the past few years. It seems fit, at the time when the sixth anniversary of STPA is being celebrated, to examine some key issues and problems concerning the development of the programme as well as the future plan of action.

3. The first of these issues relates to the organisation of the programme. It should be pointed out that the STPA is a co-ordinated effort between African Governments and relevant national institutions on the one hand, and bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and institutions as well as intergovernmental organizations on the other hand. The regional machanism which exists at ECA has the overall responsibility for co-ordinating the STPA.

4. Another important issue concerns the results of the Study of the Needs for Statistical Training in Africa jointly undertaken by the Statistical Office of the European Communities, on behalf of the Commission of the European Communities, the Secretariat of the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP States) and ECA. This study, which was announced at the last session of the Joint Conference, constitutes the first response of the Commission of the European Communities to the request submitted to it by the ACP Council of Ministers, on behalf of African Governments, for regional funding of statistical training for the region.

5. This leads to the question of technical and financial assistance for African statistical training. The consequential effects of the recent cuts in the budget of the regional component of STPA financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be examined.

6. It is recognized that the availability of student-fellowships is one of the major problems facing the development of STPA. The action which should be taken by African Governments and donor agencies in this regard will be stressed. The follow-up action undertaken in respect of the request submitted to the Commission of the European Communities, as indicated earlier, as well as the contributions expected from other bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and institutions, including the United Nations Organisation, will be reviewed.

7. A report will be made about new developments concerning the special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries in the field of statistical training.

8. Finally, the future plan of action will be outlined in the light of the consideration of the issues and problems indicated above.

II. Programme organisation

9. A number of issues which will be addressed under this section will be found in the report of the third meeting of Directors of Centres participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) - E/ECA/PSD.3/20.

10. The operational activities of STPA include the following:

i) The provision of adequate numbers of student fellowships for training at the participating centres,

ii) The support of all statistical training institutions of a regional or sub-regional nature through the provision of fellowships for training of trainers, the recruitment of lecturers and short-term consultants, the provision of equipment, the assistance in the expansion of facilities and the co-operative development of teaching programmes, particularly by strengthening co-operation among the various training centres;

iii) The provision of assistance to countries in establishing and strengthening national statistical training programmes, especially for in-service and middle level training,

iv) The provision of special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries in the field of statistical training;

v) The appropriate dissemination of information on statistical training activities including annual surveys of activities of centres participating in the STPA which cover information on number of students, curricula review, financing and any associated problems.

11. The question of fellowships for studies at STPA centres will be considered again in another section of the present paper. Nevertheless, it should be made clear at this point that trainee fellowships are not eligible for consideration under the regional programmes of donor agencies and that the relevant requests have to be submitted within the framework of the programmes which the donor agencies established with each country. Proposals will be made later on concerning ways and means of overcoming this crucial problem of availability of trainee fellowships.

12. The programme provides support to all participating centres which comprise presently 15 members and 5 associate members.

13. It seems useful to review the criteria for admitting new members in order to fully respond to the objectives assigned to the programme. Two major criteria were used to admit initial members to STPA, namely:

i) the international nature of services offered; and

ii) the practical nature of teaching programmes, responding to the needs of national statistical services.

14. It has been realized that the criteria regarding the international nature of services offered no longer seems to be strictly adhered to by some STPA centres. This is due partly to the difficult local conditions prevailing in some host countries at the moment. Another reason is the existence in many English-speaking African countries of university facilities which could be used for training statisticians, although their curricula are not often practically oriented.

15. On the whole, the criteria relating to the practical nature of teaching has been observed by STPA centres which actively participate in the co-operative development of teaching programmes, especially through the meeting of Directors of centres participating in the programme.

16. It is suggested that the support to all centres participating presently in the programme should continue but that the volume of the assistance should take into account the magnitude of the regional services effectively offered. It is hoped that the local situations will improve in the course of time in those host countries where this factor is an obstacle to the participation of more students from other African countries for training in the field of statistics.

17. For the future, it is proposed that only de jure regional statistical training institutions or national statistical training centres where foreign students make up at least a third of the total number of the students enrolled could be considered for admission as members of STPA. In addition, the curricula of the centres concerned should be geared to the training of practising statisticians and they should have provided a significant number of trained statisticians to national statistical services as well as other government statistics departments of the region.

18. The main criteria for selecting STPA associate centres are the following: (i) regular organization of short refresher and/or specialized training courses for practising statisticians; (ii) adaptation of curricula to the problems of developing countries; (iii) participation in the courses of a significant number of candidates from the African region; (iv) establishment of links with STPA centres. Efforts are being made to identify other associate centres, especially French-speaking ones, in view of the importance of requirements in this area.

19. As it will be indicated in the following section of this document, the requirements for professional staff of the English-speaking African countries and for middle level staff of both English and French-speaking countries have increased rapidly as compared with the estimates from the 1977 ECA study of statistical training needs in Africa. Therefore, relevant national facilities have to be established and/or strengthened, especially as regards the in-service and middle level statistical training. The assistance of donor agencies and institutions in this respect could take the form of recruitment of lecturers and short-term consultants, provision of equipment and development of teaching materials.

20. Proposals have already been made to the European Economic Community for the recruitment of consultants, under the regional programme of the European Development

Fund (EDF), to prepare teaching materials for in-service, middle level and professional statistical training. It has also been suggested that working groups should be organised to review these teaching materials and to recommend the necessary follow-up action.

21. The special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries in the field of statistical training will be examined under a separate section.

22. Finally, one of the main activities underlined in the work programme of STPA is the dissemination of information on all statistical training activities and related matters within and outside the region. The main objective of this dissemination is to: (i) inform all the African countries about the statistical training opportunities available in and outside the region; (ii) let each STPA and associate centre know about the development of statistical training activities in the region within the framework of STPA; (iii) interest all relevant bodies such as bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and institutions, intergovernmental organizations, etc. in the problems of African statistical training with a view to drawing their attention to the financial and technical support required in that field.

23. So far, information has been disseminated through various means which include the following:

- Circular letters: These are used by the secretariat as a means of disseminating important information about the implementation of the STPA and on some special short-term statistical courses organized outside the region.

- Directory of STPA centres: This biennial publication includes detailed information on each STPA centre such as the teaching staff, the teaching programmes, the conditions of admission and the living conditions. It assists national statistical services, UNDP offices in Africa and other departments interested in the training programme to be able to identify centres to which trainees could be sent.

- STPA News: It provides concise, up-to-date and easily accessible information about the STPA in general on a regular and more frequent basis than the Directory. Following a recommendation of the Meeting of Directors of Centres participating in the STPA, the ECA secretariat now endeavours to include in the STPA News information about short-term specialised statistical training courses available to African countries. Six issues of the STPA News have been published so far.

- Statistical Newsletter: It gives a summary of the main activities undertaken in the ECA Statistics Division, including STPA activities, particularly the summary report of the missions carried out in that framework.

24. It is envisaged to strengthen co-operation between STPA centres and associate centres mainly in the areas of the training of trainers for STPA centres and the co-ordination of their training activities. For that reason, it is hoped that more information on associate centres training activities of interest to the region can be disseminated through the STPA bulletin.

25. The secretariat is also planning to compile the statistical teaching programmes of non-STPA centres in a directory for wider dissemination. To achieve that objective, the secretariat will need the collaboration of all national statistical offices in getting national statistical training centres available in the region to send relevant information to the ECA Statistics Division.

III. Conclusions and recommendations of the joint EEC/ACP/ECA Study of the Needs for Statistical Training in Africa

26. The objectives of the study were: (i) to heighten awareness by government authorities of the importance of comprehensive and reliable statistics for economic and social development planning; (ii) to collect information, country by country, which will enable statistical training needs to be estimated for the next ten years by type and level of training; (iii) to evaluate the resources which would be necessary to satisfy these needs, the ways in which these resources might be provided by external assistance, and the conditions required to ensure the effectiveness of such assistance in improving African statistical services.

27. The study covered 37 African countries South of Sahara. The Maghreb countries were not visited since they were not signatories to the Lomé Convention. Also, a special study would be needed for the Portuguese-speaking African countries.

28. The results of the study will be presented at length at the Meeting of Directors of STPA centres scheduled to be held in Addis Ababa from 31 October - 4 November 1983. Since the report of that meeting will be made available to the present Conference, only the main conclusions and recommendations will be given under the present section. They are summarised below.

29. African countries and aid agencies should ensure that the training of statisticians produces effective results in the improvement of their statistical systems. Statistical services must be better organised with precise but comprehensive work programmes, and with statistical units spread throughout the regions of the country and in other ministries as more trained staff become available. However, it should be pointed out that the activities concerning all aspects of the development of the statistical system should be co-ordinated in an effective way. These include decisions on statistical priorities, harmonisation of concepts, definitions, classifications and methods. It is also important that a high-level body, which can take decisions at the political level, be set up to ensure this co-ordination.

30. In order to achieve the objectives of the statistical development programme, within the context of the national plan, statistical services must have necessary resources to carry out their functions, especially in terms of an adequate supply of

trained personnel, provision of own data processing and printing facilities and sufficient funds to cover other recurrent costs.

31. Statistical services must ensure that the statistics they produce are meeting the needs of their countries. They should make the data more accessible and understandable and undertake some primary analysis. They must also be concerned with the speed and continuity of their work so that statistical publications and reports on surveys, etc. can be issued regularly, in a timely manner.

32. Finally, the work programmes and the working conditions of the statistical services should be sufficiently attractive in order to minimize the loss of trained staff to other government departments and the private sector. This requires an improvement in remuneration performance and the establishment of a well-structured scheme of service.

33. The results of the study indicate an overall requirement of some 5,200 professional and 7,500 middle level statisticians to be trained during the ten-year period 1983-92 for 36 African countries out of the 37 countries which have been covered. The estimates exclude Nigeria for which it was assumed that all requirements will be met from its own resources.

34. The distribution of staff requirements by level and language group is as follows:

Post-graduate training	
English	1,070
French	240
Total	1,310
First degree training	
English	3,065
French	860
Total	3,925
Middle level training	
English	4,540
French	2,980
Total	7,520

35. As already indicated, these figures suggest that there has been a rapid increase in the requirements for professional staff (first degree and post-graduate) for the English-speaking countries and for middle level staff in both language groups as compared with the estimates from the 1977 ECA study of statistical training needs in Africa.

36. It is suggested that the requirements of the English-speaking African countries at the first degree level should be met by the existing STPA centres and other national universities having departments of statistics. In this connection, more emphasis should be given to courses in statistical methods rather than mathematical statistics especially in non-STPA centres.

37. The need for postgraduate training in applied statistics has been stressed by the English-speaking countries and one STPA centre has already been identified for this purpose. Another STPA centre could also be considered as a possibility.

38. The ten-year requirements of the French-speaking African countries for professional statisticians are very similar to the estimates from the 1977 study mentioned above. These requirements will be met mainly by the French-speaking STPA centres. However, some courses at the ingénieur des travaux statistiques (ITS) level have been reported to be planned in Benin and Madagascar. The transfer of the training of ingénieurs statisticiens économistes (ISE) from CESD in Paris to at least two STPA centres is also envisaged.

39. As regards the training of middle level statisticians, the study concludes that highest priority should be given to developing such training programmes locally in each country. However, there is the need to have at least one regional centre to deal on a permanent basis with the requirements of small size countries such as the Gambia, Seychelles, etc. Also, the existing STPA centres offering regional services should continue to do so until the user countries will have established effectively their own facilities.

40. Refresher training courses (seminars, workshops and study tours) for practising statisticians need to be organised as frequently as possible within African countries in order to minimize the cost and to have as wide an audience as possible. However, such courses are also offered by training institutions outside the region, including the STPA associate centres, in view of the increased demands in this area and the need to take advantage of new techniques.

41. Other types of training are required for the providers of raw data (company accountants, administrators, etc..), for the users of statistics and for the statisticians themselves for a better understanding between all three groups.

42. In the light of the above, the study recommends that African governments should demonstrate their willingness to train statisticians at all levels by:

- setting up local training facilities for sub-professional staff
- ensuring that adequate numbers of fellowships are awarded for training statisticians, either financed by national resources or by bilateral or multilateral donor agencies.

43. In order to solve administrative delays and bottlenecks, each country should plan its requests, reserving a certain number of fellowships for statistical training. In the meantime, donor agencies should facilitate and speed up the procedures for granting fellowships to candidates who are accepted for courses or pass the entrance examination.

44. Donor agencies should provide assistance to the existing training centres in order to strengthen them and improve their performance. Such assistance could take the form of lecturers and short-term consultants, fellowships for training of trainers, organization of seminars and workshops, equipment or buildings where necessary.

IV. Technical and financial assistance

45. Since the departure of Professor Biyi Afonja in September 1981 for the University of Ibadan, the post of Chief Statistical Training Adviser has been vacant. Formalities were under way to recruit his replacement when UNDP announced a global reduction of 45 per cent in the total costs of projects it finances. However, the reduction in the total budget of ECA statistics projects was only 25 per cent. In view of some commitments which has already been made especially with respect to the provision of fellowships for the training of trainers and recruitment of short-term consultants for the STPA centres, the recruitment of the Chief Statistical Training Adviser was suspended and internal rearrangements were made within the Statistics Division of ECA in order to ensure continuity in the work. Thus, since the above post became vacant, the Project Officer who is also the Chief of a Section, devotes more of his time to STPA. The Chief and the Deputy Chief of the Division also provide continuous assistance to the programme. Other staff members of the Division also assist as the need arises.

46. Nevertheless, in order to maintain a harmonious balance in the whole work programme of the ECA Statistics Division, the recruitment of a second Statistical Training Adviser, instead of the Chief Adviser, is in process. This will permit savings of about US$60,000 during the period 1983-1986. The funds will be used to support the operational activities of STPA.

47. One of the objectives of STPA is to ensure that participating centres become self-reliant. This means, among others, that they should have a sufficient number of qualified African lecturers.

48. About 15 fellowships of one to three years duration have been awarded so far under the STPA regional component financed by UNDP for training of trainers, and 12 fellowships for short-term group training. The secretariat has been informed that other lecturers from STPA centres have received fellowships offered by some donor countries. It is also expected that more fellowships for the training of trainers will be available under the regional programme of the European Development Fund (EDF) in response to the request submitted, on behalf of African governments, by the Council of Ministers of the ACP States to the Commission of the European Communities.

49. Many STPA centres are feeling the need to increase the number of their teaching staff. This need is highly justified by the fact that the centres have to meet increased demands in conformity with the objectives of STPA, the teaching staff under training is often not replaced and the recruitment of new teachers is often hampered by the shortage of candidates interested in teaching and sometimes by budget restrictions.

50. On the other hand, it has been observed that some STPA centres are still heavily dependent on external assistance to provide them with teaching staff.

51. The Africanization of teaching staff already begun at the centres should be continued and intensified. In that connection, each centre should establish a trainers' training programme. Such a programme should clearly indicate the number of teachers who should be trained each year during a period of five or ten years and should include campaigns to persuade young graduates to go into the teaching of statistics as a career. The programme should be duly approved by the appropriate authorities of the host country and/or by the governing council of each centre.

52. New requests for the provision of teachers through external assistance should as much as possible, correspond to the trainers' training programme. Thus, foreign assistance experts could be posted to the centres when the counterpart staff are on study leave. It might, however, become necessary at the end of the training period of the counterpart staff, to make provision for a period of initiation lasting some months before the departure for good of the experts.

53. Consultants are generally needed by STPA centres to lecture in specialized areas such as sample surveys, experimental design and data processing for relatively short periods of a maximum of three months. However, some centres have requested the services of consultants to give lecturers on fundamental courses such as statistical methods and economics so that the duration of contracts had to be extended in some cases. The use of consultants for such fundamental courses should be avoided as far as possible in future. About 32 consultancy assignments of duration varying from 2 weeks to 6 months have been financed so far by the STPA regional component in support of the participating centres.

54. It is a well known fact that one of the major problems in developing STPA concerns availability of fellowships for studies at centres participating in the programme. One of the major causes of this problem lies in the administrative procedures. The services sponsoring candidates may not know how to go about applying for fellowships from the various donor countries and agencies. As a result, requests may be sent too late, may arrive too late, cannot be considered because inappropriate procedures are used, or may become lost in a bureaucratic maze. The various parties concerned have to make concerted efforts to resolve the problem. The recipient countries should plan their fellowship needs and communicate to the various donor countries and agencies, at the beginning of each year, the number of fellowships they wish to reserve for statistical training by level of course. They should also contact the local representatives of the various donor countries and agencies to enquire about procedures for submitting fellowship applications.

55. The donor countries and agencies should set aside the number of fellowships requested and proceed to their award, following accelerated procedures, as soon as the STPA centres decide which candidates they will admit on the basis of the result of entrance examination or after consideration of application forms. They should also ensure that their procedures for fellowship applications are widely circulated among African countries.

56. STPA centres should send to the countries and the donor countries and agencies concerned the lists of candidates admitted for the following academic year as soon as such lists become available. They should also make it a point to regularly draw the attention of user countries to the various possible sources of fellowships, including national resources.

57. A revision of the request for regional funding of African statistical training submitted in December 1980 to the Commission of the European Communities was undertaken jointly by ECA and the ACP Secretariat. This revision takes fully into account the results of the joint EEC/ACP/ECA Study of the Needs for Statistical Training in Africa.

58. In accordance with the recommendations of the above study, the immediate objectives of the regional project submitted to EEC are to support all statistical training institutions of a regional or sub-regional nature through:

i) the provision of fellowships for training of teaching staff;
ii) the recruitment of lecturers and short-term consultants;
iii) the provision of financial assistance in the organization of regional seminars and workshops as well as study tours;
iv) the assistance in the development of teaching materials; and
v) the provision of equipment.

59. Separate requests concerning capital expenditures on buildings (e.g. for the Abidjan, Dar-es-Salaam and Kigali centres) are not considered under this regional project.

60. The total contributions requested from the European Economic Community (EEC) for the five-year period 1984-1988 amount to US dollars 4,136,000. This figure may change slightly after the discussions, which will take place soon after the preparation of the present paper, with the ACP Secretariat, the Commission of the European Communities and SOEC.

61. It is hoped that supplementary information on the progress made concerning the consideration of this regional request by EEC could be brought to the attention of the Conference.

62. It should be pointed out that the above regional request does not take into account the assistance of EEC under the multi-year programmes which it establish with each ACP state. These country programmes can be used for financing trainee fellowships and the establishment and/or strengthening of national training facilities in the field of statistics.

63. Such assistance can also be requested from other donors such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under its Indicative Planning Figures (country IPFs), the Commonwealth Fund for Technical co-operation (CFTC), France, United Kingdom, Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, Portugal, United States of America (USA) and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). These donors

have already provided assistance to African statistical training and have expressed an interest in continuing and strengthening their participation.

V. Special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries

64. At the last session of the Conference, it was reported that Portuguese-speaking African countries had recommended, during a meeting held at Addis Ababa in October 1980, the regionalisation of the Luanda Centre in Angola to train the Middle level statistical personnel required by these countries. Later on, the ECA Conference of Ministers, held at Freetown in April 1981, adopted the Resolution 415(XVI) requesting the ECA Executive Secretary to take all appropriate steps to provide technical assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries within the framework of STPA and urging the United Nations Development Programme to give adequate financial support to the national and regional projects to be proposed by countries in the group.

65. An ECA mission visited Maputo, Mozambique, in November 1982 in order to obtain confirmation of the country's willingness to use the Luanda Centre. In fact, only Mozambique was not represented at the 1980 Addis Ababa meeting. The ECA mission could not get a clear-cut answer to the question.

66. The ECA mission was next scheduled to visit Angola to discuss ways and means of implementing the project for strengthening the Luanda Centre but it was informed that the country's authorities were not ready to receive such a mission.

67. After considering all the relevant facts and in view of the present situation in the Southern Africa, the secretariat has come to the conclusion that it would not be possible to implement at this time the project of strengthening the Luanda Centre. It seems, therefore, advisable to suggest alternative solutions in order to meet the requirements of the countries of the group.

68. In this connexion, the secretariat is planning to hire a consultant to review the statistical training needs of the Portuguese-speaking African countries and to prepare a guide syllabus for in-service statistical training for the use of these countries. A number of Portuguese-speaking candidates have already been identified and the recruitment process will start soon after the programme of missions will have been agreed upon by the countries concerned.

69. It is also envisaged to hire, at a later stage, one or two consultants to prepare teaching materials, in the Portuguese language, to be used by the countries of the group in connexion with the guide syllabus for in-service statistical training referred to above.

70. The secretariat is prepared to provide technical assistance to the Portuguese-speaking African countries in their efforts to establish and/or develop in-service statistics training programmes. It is also willing to assist aid agencies wishing to help the countries of the group in this endeavour.

71. Efforts will be made at the same time to identify statistical training centres, both within and outside the region, which could be used by these countries for training statistical personnel at the professional level. Meanwhile young university graduates in economics, mathematics, sociology and related fields could be recruited by the national statistical services of the countries concerned. These young graduates could be sent abroad for short-term specialised training in the field of statistics. Such short-term courses could also be organized on a periodic basis in one or two countries of the group for all of them.

72. Donor countries and agencies should consider the possibility of financing the special statistics training programme for the Portuguese-speaking African countries within the context of the overall STPA.

VI. Future plan of action

73. In the light of the above, it is proposed that the future plan of action for the overall Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) should focus on the following issues:

- Better planning of fellowships and streamlining of the procedures for awarding them which involve the African countries and donor agencies;

- Assistance to countries in the establishment and/or development of local facilities for middle level and/or in-service statistical training;

- Strengthening of the regional nature of STPA centres;

- Support to STPA centres according to the importance of the regional services offered;

- Assistance in the establishment of post-graduate courses in applied statistics in at least two English-speaking centres, e.g. at the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE), University of Makerere, and the Department of Statistics, University of Ibadan;

- Assistance in the establishment of ingénieurs statisticiens économistes (ISE) course in at least two French-speaking centres, e.g. at the Institut de statistique, de planification et d'économie appliquée (ISPEA) Yaoundé, and the Ecole nationale supérieure de statistique et d'économie appliquée (ENSEA), Abidjan;

- Co-operative development of teaching programmes for training at all levels, including the preparation of guide syllabuses and relevant teaching materials;

- Assistance in the organization of refresher courses, seminars and workshops in the field of statistics, either by STPA centres or STPA associate centres;

- Assistance to STPA centres in establishing links with recognized statistical training institutions outside the region;

- Special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries in the field of statistical training.

74. As already pointed out in this paper, the implementation of the above plan of action requires a concerted effort between African Governments and relevant national institutions on the one hand, and bilateral and multilateral donor countries and agencies as well as international organizations on the other hand.

75. More specifically, follow-up action will be undertaken on the request submitted to EEC for regional funding of African statistical training. Steps will be taken to ensure that the activities of this project are co-ordinated with those within the overall STPA programme.

76. The present session of the Joint Conference is invited to:

- express its opinion on the activities carried out so far under STPA at the time when the programme is about to celebrate its sixth anniversary;

- comment on the issues and problems pointed out in the present document and raise any other relevant questions for discussions;

- comment and formulate suggestions on the proposed future plan of action for STPA as indicated above'

- adopt, after due consideration, the report of the third meeting of Directors of Centres participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA).